

EXHIBIT 1

OP-ED CONTRIBUTORS

Closing Rikers Island Is a Moral Imperative

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The time has come to close Rikers Island.

New York City's sprawling main jail, located on an island in the East River, is a stain on our great city's reputation. It leaves its mark on everyone it touches: the correction officers working back-to-back shifts under dangerous conditions, the inmates waiting for their day in court in an inhumane and violent environment, the family members forced to travel long distances to see their loved ones and the taxpayers who spend billions of dollars to keep the whole dysfunctional apparatus running.

These problems will not be fixed with a fresh coat of paint, new trainings or even a major facilities overhaul. They run far too deep.

Since the 1930s, Rikers has served as a de facto penal colony, isolating inmates and officers alike from the outside world, to the detriment of all. It is a world unto itself, where the values that govern the rest of New York — civility and decency among them — do not apply.

To be fair, there is much within our criminal justice system to celebrate. The past 30 years have seen dramatic reductions in crime and incarceration in New York City. Today, the city's entire jail population is under 10,000, about half of what it was in the 1990s. Through innovative policing strategies, the expansion of alternatives to incarceration and myriad other progressive efforts, the city has demonstrated that less jail does not mean more crime.

Even as we celebrate those achievements, we must acknowledge our jails have become costlier and more dangerous. Indeed, the cost of jailing someone in New York City has ballooned to nearly \$250,000 a year, roughly the cost of a four-year Ivy League degree, while stabbings and slashings have quadrupled in the last decade.

Some of the most moving testimony heard during meetings or hearings of the Independent Commission on New York City Criminal Justice and Incarceration Reform — created by Ms. Mark-Viverito and led by Mr. Lippman — came from family members recalling visits to

children or partners. One parent called Rikers “Torture Island,” referring to the treatment of her son and of herself. A one-hour visit with a loved one is really a daylong ordeal, given the island’s inaccessibility.

This inconvenience might be worth suffering if Rikers were effective at rehabilitating inmates and making our city safer. Unfortunately, the opposite is true. There is ample evidence that spending even 48 hours in jail increases the likelihood of future justice system involvement.

Rebuilding Rikers is not the answer. The island’s isolation and inaccessibility are at the root of the systematic problems — denying people their right to a speedy trial, completely disconnecting inmates from family and their community, keeping the facility out of public sight and scrutiny, fostering a bunker mentality among staff. Furthermore, the “culture of violence” the United States Department of Justice found on Rikers Island is indelibly linked to that location. These issues cannot be fixed on the island. Sending everyone arrested in New York City to one remote island is a 19th-century solution to a 21st-century problem. It’s a broken model.

We now have a realistic alternative. With the help of research from the Center for Court Innovation and the Vera Institute of Justice, the commission has identified a series of evidence-based criminal justice reforms to safely reduce the city’s jail population to 5,000 inmates within 10 years, largely by cutting unnecessary delays in criminal case processing and ending the practice of warehousing defendants at Rikers while they await trial for low-level, nonviolent crimes.

Shrinking the population would allow the city to create borough-based jail facilities, a far more humane, effective and efficient alternative to the mass incarceration model, according to research from the Institute for State and Local Governance. The commission recommends closing Rikers and locating borough facilities near courthouses and civic centers — not in residential neighborhoods — and distributing the inmate population equitably across the boroughs. This model can work: The Brooklyn House of Detention reopened in Downtown Brooklyn in 2012, and it has done nothing to deter the housing and retail boom there.

By closing the huge jail complex on Rikers Island, New York would be able to repurpose the island in a way that benefits all New Yorkers. The island could become a valuable asset, rather than a money pit, by housing infrastructure like power-generation or garbage-disposal facilities that New York will need for generations to come. Doing so will free up desperately needed space in our neighborhoods.

Let's not kid ourselves: Building new jails in New York City will be a difficult challenge. The main obstacle is not financial — creating a new state-of-the-art jail system will ultimately save the city millions of dollars.

The main obstacle is political. We need to motivate our elected officials and the general public. We need to articulate a simple truth: We are better than this. Rikers Island is an affront to the civic values of New York City. Reforming our jail system and closing Rikers Island is not simply good public policy — it is a moral imperative.

At its best, New York City has always been a place where people fight for fairness. As we strive to make New York a more just and humane city, we must close Rikers Island and end once and for all the despair and damage it causes.